

Pastor accused of abuse dies

BY STAFF WRITER

JAY TOKASZ

A Seneca Falls priest who was on administrative leave because of an allegation of sexual abuse died late Wednesday.

The Rev. David N. Gramkee, pastor of St. Patrick Church, was airlifted to Robert Packer Hospital in Sayre, Pa., after a stroke.

Gramkee was 62.

Gramkee had been accused of sexually abusing a girl in her late teens in the 1970s, although the priest disputed when the alleged abuse took place and the age of the victim at the time.

During his leave, which was to last a year, he could not wear priestly clothing, perform the duties of a priest or live at the parish or any other diocesan property.

It was unclear what would have happened once the leave had been completed. However, Gramkee had hired a lawyer to ensure that the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester abided by canon law in determining his fate.

The priest was beloved by parishioners at St. Patrick and at other parishes where he served.

Even after his removal, many church members defended Gramkee and criticized Bishop Matthew H. Clark for acting too harshly.

"He was just there for everyone, all the time. It didn't matter who it was or from what social background," said Kathy Brown, parish secretary.

The Rev. Daniel Holland, pastor of St. Pius X Church in Chili, said Gramkee was a compassionate man who "was able to

touch people's hearts when others could not."

"He was a wonderful storyteller," said Holland. "His sermons were very short but always included wonderful stories. I'd often call him on a Saturday and say 'David, I need a story.'"

Sharon Baldwin, who worked at the church, often cooking meals for Gramkee, called the priest "the most wonderful man" she had ever met.

Baldwin described Gramkee as a superb homilist who did countless acts of generosity, without ever attaching conditions.

She said the priest "was sad but hopeful" about his situation.

"It was not a fitting end for a person who did the amount of good he did," said Baldwin.

Clark said he was saddened by Gramkee's death.

"He had a deep love for the people he served and worked very hard to do the best that he could for them. He achieved a great deal throughout his ministry," the bishop said.

Gramkee celebrated his final Mass at St. Patrick on June 25.

A Rochester native, Gramkee was ordained in 1966 and served at parishes in Ithaca; Rochester; Auburn, Cayuga County; Pittsford; and Elmira.

He was pastor at St. Patrick Church since 1992.

Gramkee's removal came shortly after the nation's nearly 300 Catholic bishops agreed on a new national policy to respond to the sexual abuse scandal roiling the church.

The "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" calls for the removal of a

priest from ministry for even a single act of sexual abuse of a minor — past, present or future.

The diocese first learned of the accusation against Gramkee in 1993.

A panel of lay professionals at that time recommended that Gramkee seek counseling but be allowed to continue in ministry because there were no other allegations of abuse.

In March and in May, the victim contacted the diocese and provided new information regarding the time of the alleged abuse and her age at the time.

An estimated 500 people packed the church Wednesday evening to pray for Gramkee, who suffered the stroke on Tuesday at his cottage home in Interlaken, Seneca County.

He was found by a friend and taken to Cayuga Medical Center in Ithaca before being transported by helicopter to the Sayre hospital. He was pronounced dead at 10:45 p.m.

He is predeceased by his parents, Bruce and Frances.

He is survived by one sister, Mary "Kate" Mangan; one brother, John F. Gramkee of Rochester; and nieces and nephews.



1988 file photo

The Rev. David Gramkee, the pastor of St. Patrick Church in Seneca Falls, died on Wednesday.

He will lie in state at St. Patrick Church from 3 to 7 p.m. Sunday, followed by evening prayer at 7:30 p.m.

Clark will preside at a funeral liturgy at 10:30 a.m. Monday.

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CITY LIVING

DOWNTOWN

RPO marimbas to play Sunday

The free Sunday Serenades concert series will conclude

will be moved to St. Mary Church, 15 St. Mary's Place across the street from Washington Square Park.

For further details, call (585) 428-6697.

EAST AVENUE

World Gym asks for blood donors